

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

Ash Wednesday
February 28, 1968

WASHINGTON

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This was a day that ran the full gamut of emotion, from tears to laughter. A day of grinding work and robot hand shaking, and people and events crowding every hour.

Lyndon was up early, though he hadn't gotten to bed until past two thirty, having breakfast with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Clark Clifford, and General Wheeler, Dick Helms, General Taylor, George, and Walt, and Tom.

And I discovered that we had four more houseguests, the Cecil Burneys and the Crocket Englishs, who had come in on the plane with Lyndon. I called them, and went up to have a second cup of coffee with them. And Carol Burney gave me an hilarious description of how the usher had gone from room to room with their bags in his hands, musing outside of the door, whether there was anybody in that room. Finally, they had been put in the Queen's Room, the only vacant one.

We are running practically a YWCA on the third floor, with Warrie Lynn and Dianna Hedges, and Mary has just left.

Tomorrow, the Governors and their ladies will be her for the style show I'm having for the ladies, I will need a white dress that will show off the red, white and blue scarf ~~which~~ with the "Discover America" motif, so I tried on a number, chose one, worked with Liz.

Had a luncheon of scrambled eggs on a tray in my room, and just minutes before one o'clock, went down to the ushers office, to wait for Lyndon. I am usually there, and then when he gets out of the elevator, I fall into step beside

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him and we march in for the ceremony, whatever it is, in the East Room.

This ceremony was like no other. Lyndon was giving ~~the~~ the Medal of Freedom to Bob McNamara, and saying goodbye. And I was going, with courage screwed up, and with determined brightness and a tight hold on my feelings.

Lynda came rushing in to the Usher's office, ashes on her forehead. Somebody said Margie was in the Red Room, so we went in. And there, with Margie, was daughter Margie, Mrs. Barrie Carter, and Kathy and Craig. A surprise for Bob, Margie said. She had called them and told them to come down from school, and wherever they were, and in a moment Lyndon and Bob came in together, and we all went into the East Room.

This time, the podium was at the end toward the ellipse. Bob and Margie and the three children, standing stiffly erect in front of massed flags. Almost all the Cabinet grouped on the front rows. Family, personal friends, Pentagon brass and Under Secretaries, and a big galaxie of press.

There was an electric feeling in the room. If I have ever sensed emotion, it was there today.

Lyndon began swiftly. He described Bob as one of America's most valuable public properties. He said, "...that America is giving to the world, and if I may be personal, I am giving to the world, the very best that we have win the most important war of all, the war against poverty, disease, ignorance, and hopelessness." He described the Secretary as an "intensely loyal,

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brilliant and good man."

For all the great soaring words, I could keep my composure, but that simple word 'good' almost undid me, and it did not help to look around the room. There were stricken faces, and tight composure, and frank tears.

At the end, Lyndon said, "I predict that 20 years from now, another President will stand here and say "A revolution of achievement in the developing nations began with the appointment of Robert S. McNamara, to the World Bank in 1968"". And then he gave the handsome medal to Bob, and there was a barrage of pictures, and Bob approached the podium, gripping the edge, and looking around the room.

And then he said, quite simply, "I cannot find words to express what lies in my heart, and I guess I better respond on another occasion."

Through my mind kept ringing the words - "Seven years, seven years". I know just a little bit of what it takes out of blood, and bone, and heart, and also what kind of comradeship it forges.

Margie was one of the most contained people in the room. And then it was over and we went in the Blue Room, to form the receiving line. By they came, Chief Justice Earl Warren; the Cabinet, and all such sort of high level officials; members of the House, including George Mahon, and even Mendel Rivers. Senators Bob Kennedy and Ted Kennedy and their wives; Sargent Shriver, the Byrons Whites and Abe Fortas'; Generals Chapman and Omar Bradley; Averill Harriman; the Dean Achesons; Alice Longworth; the Roger Stevens; and Clark Clifford, who will be sworn in tomorrow.

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We had family pictures with Bob and Margie and their three children. And then, saying over and over, "We'll see you when you get back from Aspen. Have a good time skiing."

We left and I went upstairs, and it was alright to cry, and Luci would have been proud of me. She holds aggressively to the opinion that if you don't cry, if you don't let off steam, if you don't get mad or laugh, something awful will happen to me, and she really fears for me.

But it was a short few moments because I had to get into a dress, to be photographed with the models for the "Discover America" style show tomorrow, down on the South Lawn.

And then to the Library for pictures of the members of the Business and Professional Women's group, receiving from President Mabel McClanahan, the Crime Prevention kit, they are distributing to their 178,000 members across the country.

And then, at 3:30 there was the second crowd of the day. A tea for the National Council of Jewish Women. I had telephoned Dorothy Goldberg, to ask her if she would come and stand in line with me, to receive them.

Mrs. Leonard Weiner, the President, presented me with a book, Where There is a Woman, the history of the organization, and then Dorothy and I stood in the Blue Room and received the 300 or so members, only a very few of whom I knew. Mrs. Stanley Bregman, from the Woman's National Democratic Club, and Mrs. Wilbur Cohen, and Peggy Goldstein, Mary Keiserling, and

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Jean Kintner. Neither of us mentioned Bob's letter. Katie Louchheim, and Dorothy Marks. And several of whom I suppose, were invited guests, not members. Jane Freeman, Betty Furness, Virginia Rusk and Benetta Washington.

They were a very well dressed, smart looking group, and there's hardly ever been an organization that went through, that seemed more appreciative and said so more warmly.

I lingered and had tea, and chatted with as many as I could.

I was back upstairs before five, to work on the captions for the Good Housekeeping article, with Liz. Which I did, stretched out in the beautiful canopy bed. It's funny how exhausting it is to simply stand in line and try to give every one of three hundred women, a moment of individual interested attention, and in many cases, to recall a mutual interest or friend, or where we've met before. Justified or not, I was tired. Liz already had the captions in rather good order.

Somebody alerted us and at 5:30 we turned on the TV and Romney was announcing that he was quitting the race. A dignified, realistic sort of speech, he acquitted himself well, I thought.

At eight, I dressed for our guests, Governor Brannigan. There was supposed to be just the three of us, and settled myself with some work, to wait for them, and it was 9:20 before Lyndon arrived, bringing the Governor.

We sat down for dinner. The Governor has very brown eyes and very

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white hair, parchment like skin, and the liveliest manner. He reminds me of Carl Estes. You cannot mention a person or an event, that he doesn't know and have some story about. He was a very interesting person and I could not, to save me, decide what I really thought about him.

Lyndon called Sam Houston and invited him down for dinner. He does it more and more. It is a kindness past price. Sam Houston drinks up the political talk, which ranged over Governors, and problems and national issues.

A little bit before eleven, to my great discomfort, Lyndon said, "Let's drive out to Marvin Watson's," knowing that tomorrow is a sheer tour de force, and that he's got a bushel of work on the bed waiting for him. I said, "No, it's eleven o'clock." But he gathered us up, like a whirlwind, and out we went to Bob Kerr's lovely house, on the wooded knoll above the Potomac.

Marvin and beautiful little Marian, with the demure little black velvet school girl dress with the white bow, were waiting for us at the front door. And the Buford Ellingtons, Dick Hughes, and young Governor Docking of Kansas with his strawberry blond wife; and a couple of our staff members, were having coffee and cake, never a drop of liquor at Marvin Watson's house.

And all the men were grouped together in serious conversation, and all the ladies together. Betty Hughes entertaining us and what she had to say was

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really a thrilling thing. She's leaving early in March, to go into a hospital for four months. She will completely separate herself from her life, and concentrate only on getting her potential diabetes and her weight problems, glandular or whatever they are, under control.

She showed me pictures of a young girl who had lost 70 pounds under this doctor's care. It was a miracle.

And she is going to write a book while she's doing it. It's daring, and exciting, and very wise, I think. I'm thrilled for her.

She said, that she had made a simple statement about it, a fact, "because, she said, "if I didn't, people would say I'd had a nervous breakdown, or gone up to take the alcoholic cure." In spite of her 200 plus pounds, she is, to me, just about the most interesting of the 50 governor's wives - And I can't wait to see her come back.

It was after one o'clock when we reached the White House, and I was ~~surprised~~ surprised to see lights on in the East Room, lights on in the Red and Green Room. Apparently they were rehearsing, not for one, but for two entertainments tomorrow. The Style Show and Fiorello.

What a marvel Bess is.

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